

Good evening Senator Harp and Representative Geragosian and the appropriations committee for the opportunity to let me speak to you today about the Commission on the Deaf and the Hearing-Impaired (CDHI).

I am Luisa Gasco-Soboleski, Chairperson of the Advisory Board of the Commission on the Deaf and Hearing Impaired.

The Connecticut Commission on the Deaf and Hearing Impaired has been in operation for more than 35 years. I am proud to say that Connecticut was the first state in the country to establish this kind of agency to serve the deaf and hard of hearing community and became a role model for other states. Deafness is an invisible handicap and communication inaccessibility is a great barrier experienced by many deaf and hard of hearing citizens. CDHI has provided interpreter services which make communication more accessible. The deaf and hard of hearing citizens of Connecticut still recognize this agency as the most viable and visible state agency.

It is understood that the state of Connecticut is facing budget crisis and the state sees a need to consolidate many agencies and proposes to move the CDHI into the Department of Social Services (DSS).

Let me share some important facts about CDHI. CDHI currently provides critical services to the community such as advocacy, counseling and certified sign language interpreting services. CDHI also is mandated to monitor the statewide registry of Connecticut working sign language interpreters, insuring that only "qualified" interpreters are active in the community.

The counseling services have not been available for the last six months due to

retirements. There was a waiting list of 48 individuals awaiting for service, now that the agency has hired one counselor the number of requests have grown. Counseling support without communication barriers is productive and successful to help individuals maintain their independence and lead productive lives.

There are 43 sign language interpreters all nationally certified by the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf/National Association of the Deaf.

The interpreting services are reimbursable.

CDHI provided coverage for over 16,000 interpreting assignments; or approximately 66,000 hours of interpreting, this is a modest and rough estimate of service provided, these hours are spilt among the 43 part-time interpreters.

Each month the CDHI interpreting department gets about 1,600 requests.

The Commission provides the resources needed for the State of Connecticut to meet their legal obligations to provide equal access to goods and services provided by the State.

About seventy five percent of services support requests were made by other state agencies relating to state business. Federal and State Law, American with Disability Act (ADA), mandates that the rights of citizens, including those with disabilities, be protected. Many of CDHI's appointments provide communication access for health and safety issues for the State of Connecticut Judicial Department, Department of Children and Families, State Police, and Judicial court related businesses. CDHI is also responsible to oversee the Telecommunication Relay Services mandated

by the FCC.

All in all, CDHI is a small State of Connecticut agency making an enormous impact!

Agency statistics document its importance. CDHI interpreting services cannot be duplicated by any other State or private agency.

There is no other agency that exists to advocate, strengthen and implement state policies for the deaf and hard of hearing. The continued existence of CDHI helps ensure that Connecticut is working with its deaf and hard of hearing population.

Once CDHI merges with DSS, the accessibility for deaf and hard of hearing citizens will once again be where it was before CDHI started. The DSS office is not deaf and hard of hearing friendly.

CDHI needs to remain as a cohesive unit.

Deaf and hard of hearing people in the state of Connecticut are proud to be citizens of this state. We hope that you honor our plea and consider the importance of our needs.

Luisa Gasco Soboleska
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